

## [Earl Guenther]

26025 [??]

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Earl Guenther (white)

708 Lemon Street

Pulatka, Florida

Barber

Bill [Lewda?], writer

Evelyn [Werner?] reviser

EARL GUENTHER

I went into Earl's Barber Shop in Polatka for a haircut. Its walls lined with mirrors; barber chairs, calendars, church schedules, shoeshine chair, and polished [cuspidors?]. [A?] partition separated it from a beauty parlor in the rear.

Earl Guenther, the owner, waited on me. [A?] talkative, heavy-set man, six foot tall, with a ruddy complexion and reddish hair, he did not work in the usual white coat, but in shirt sleeves with his collar open at the throat.

"Stranger in town? Thought so, never seen you round," he spoke with a slight drawl. "This is a good little town—progressive. [We?] managed to make a living and still have time to hunt and fish."

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It was a simple thing to get his life history—he liked to talk.

“I’m no native. I was born in Dayton Ohio, March 23, 1897. My father was Irish and my mother English. Their grandfathers came from Massachusetts into the Ohio valley, early in the eighteenth century, and settled right where Dayton stands today. I may be an Ohioan by birth all right, but I’m a Florida cracker by emigration and adoption.

“I went to Buckeye Grammar School in Dayton and worked on my Dad’s farm before and after school. We had a big farm and there was always plenty to do. I entered [Stivers?] High School when I was fourteen. Dad didn’t believe in me going to college, so when I finished high school, he gave me a job in the shop. I’ve wished since that I’d gone on to college, but I didn’t think much about it then.

“I was glad to get away from farm chores and couldn’t wait to be a barber as good as my Dad. For the first year I swept floors, shined shoes, washed windows, polished cuspidors and lathered faces, all for \$2 a week. I watched all the time and eventually I was allowed to use the clippers or scissors on one of the barbers during slack hours. It was another year before I was allowed to shave anyone.

“[Barbers?] have come a long way since then. Now we have regular barber colleges in most of the larger cities, where you not only learn to shave people and cut hair, I’ve visited the Jacksonville Barber College and they have Eighteen chairs where the students get actual experience. The first two chairs give you a shave and haircut for about two bits, the next four for twenty cents. The price decreases as you get farther back in the shop. In the last two chairs they don’t charge anything and usually give you a bag of candy as consolation.

“Barbering is more of a science all right; now methods are going to revolutionise the business. We feel that our treatments are as much for relaxation as for looks. “You know the history of that striped pole out front of barber shops? Well, in the sixteenth century

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barbers did almost everything. They did minor surgical operations, bled people, pulled teeth, trimmed hair, and sharpened knives. When a barber went to a [?], you couldn't tell by the way he dressed or the tools he carried if he had come to shave the master or inspect the plumbing. The striped pole is said to have originated from a pole in front where the barbers hung their bloody 3 bandages to dry. The wind blew them, winding them diagonally around the pole.

“Yes things have changed and no have prices. In Miami during the boom, in [1925-26?], I used to get a dollar for a haircut and a dollar for a shave. The soap we had wasn't half as nice as this one but we did a land-office business because everybody was so busy making money they didn't have time to shave themselves. I made good money, invested it in land and got caught in the crash.

“After the collapse of the land boom in '26, I started back to Dayton. I stopped off here to visit some relatives and liked it so much I decided to stay. I thought the town needed another barber shop, so I opened up this place, and I've been here thirteen years.

“Soon after I opened, a girl came and wanted to rent the back of the shop for a beauty parlor. Two years later, she thought if I'd marry her she wouldn't have to pay rent. I fooled her. I married her and now she has to pay half the rent on the whole business and I've still got the best half. [Imagine?] a [man?] going through a beauty parlor to get back to the barber shop.

“The barbers in this town have a set price to exclude unfair competition. I don't make anything like I used to—about half as much, I'd say—but then it only takes half as much to live here.

“[At?] that we make a pretty fair income. The first year after paying out for [?], [??], equipment and living expenses, I found that I'd managed to save about a hundred dollars.

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Since that time we have got equipment paid for and have managed to bank about fifty dollars a month as an 4 average. We both pay income tax.

“We take a month off every summer when things are slow and go up north for a visit. I usually spend a couple of weeks in and around Dayton with relatives and the other two weeks off touring somewhere.

“I'm always glad to get back no matter how long I'm gone. My wife can't stand the north. It's not the climate so much as the people and the customs. She's a [Palstka?] girl, born and raised right here in the South, and can't stand a bossy Negro. When one crosses her up north, well,—she has a pretty hot temper, [Ruth?] has.

“We don't have any children, but her nephew lives with us and goes to the local high school. He is a junior now and a star on the football team. He plays half-back and is slated to be next year's varsity captain.

“Besides the nephew, we've got two Chows, a Boston Bull and couple of canaries. We live in our own house, right near here. It's only a five room bungalow but it's nice. We drive a Chevrolet sedan and manage to get a new one every year. That's the best way to buy cars, because you always got a liberal allowance on the one you turn in if it's well taken care of and the dealer knows what he's getting back. By the time you had new tires and minor repairs made on your last year model you would have spent enough to pay the difference between automobiles.

“My wife and I go out a great deal. We usually see a show a week and always go the high school athletic games. They're all played at night because the football field and baseball park are lighted, and so we never miss. Because of our support and contributions to the athletic association we're invited to the annual football banquet, given in honor of the departing seniors.

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"My wife has her bridge club and I belong to several civic and fraternal organizations. We are all working together right now to do what we can about getting an appropriation through Congress this session for the completion of the Florida Ship Canal. It will come down the St. John's River right by here and on to a point twelve miles below town where it will turn across the state.

"I was one of the delegates to meet the Harbor and River Committee from [Washington?] that came down here last week. He waited all afternoon for them and finally about dark met them nine miles above here on the river with a convoy of boats. They came down from Jacksonville on a private speed boat and went from here to Ocala by car. If we get the canal it will shorten sailing time to New Orleans, Galveston and other parts in the Gulf by cutting out the trip around the Florida Straights. It would take so many of those heavy trucks off the roads. they are ruin-the [state?] highways and because of their size make it dangerous to drive on the road during the [circus?] season. [A?] boy by the name of [Howell?] was killed last week, just north of here, when his car ran into the rear of one of those trucks parked on the highway."

"Do you go to church, Earl?" I asked.

"Well we live a pretty leisured life around here," he replied. "I don't miss many Sunday nights at the Methodist church, but I spend most Sundays fishing.

"Everybody hunts and fishes and lets things take their course. Besides Sundays I take a couple of afternoons a week off, when the weather's right. The hunting was [punk?] last fall on account of the [?]. The 6 fishing this year ought to be good enough to make up for it, though. The [equinox?] has just passed and the fish will feed good all day between the new moon and first quarter. I caught a [roe?] (female) bass this spring on an artificial plug that tipped the scales at better than thirteen pounds and that was just after spawning season. With an average roe she would have weighed fifteen pounds or better. The state champion prize winner only came to a little better than fourteen pounds.

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"Do you vote?" "I interrupted.

"You bet I do," he switched topics easily. "I always vote a straight Democratic ticket but can't afford to express my opinions about local politics. I have so many customers that ask me what I think about this person for Mayor or that person for Commissioner. I immediately change the subject if I can."

He brushed me off and as I got into my coat he said, "Ever hear of James Ross Mellon, the late steel magnate from Pittsburgh, spent every winter for over forty years in his home here. About 1938 he fired the butler that always shaved him and trimmed his hair and I got the job. Used to invite my wife and myself to his home here and we always spent a few days with him when we went north. [Great?] fellow. He had retired from business and had plenty of time, and he'd take us everywhere and introduce us around like we were [ators?] or [Vanderbilts?].

I thanked him for the interview and started for the door, he called after me, "Mister, be sure and see our Devine Gardens before you leave town. It only costs 40¢ and there's eighty-five acres planted in all sorts of flowers, mostly azaleas."